RMR

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COMMENT

There are, so far as we know, only five complete files of RMR in existence. One is in the New York City Public Library, another in the library of the University of Utah, while two are in the possession of the editors. The fifth was recently assembled from back issues obtained through notices in our last two issues and is now offered for sale at $50.00. This amount, if obtained, is to be added to our fund for the eventual payment of contributors.

As a result of buying back issues for double and triple their original value, we are now in a better position to accept orders from libraries and collectors for back numbers which have long been out of print. On the whole, prices charged for such numbers will be less than we have paid to recover them, and all receipts will be credited to the contributors fund.

As announced in the Autumn number, gift subscriptions may also be credited to the contributors fund. In addition, a handsomely printed card bearing the name of the giver and announcing the gift will be sent free of charge.

* * *

Plans are now under way for a ten-day writers "workshop" to be held on the campus at Utah State College, July 8-17. Invitations are being extended to several well-known writers to serve as visiting instructors to augment the resident English faculty, and it is hoped that writers both from the Rocky Mountain area and elsewhere who are interested will plan their vacations to take advantage of this program. The workshop will be held in the Rural Arts Building on the campus, where living quarters are available, and will consist of groups in Poetry, The Novel, Short Story, and non-fiction writing. Plans call for a daily lecture program as well as the group meetings, with excursions to near-by Bear Lake and Logan Canyon included. Persons desiring additional information should write to Professor Milton R. Merrill, Director of the Summer Session, U. S. A. C., Logan, Utah, after April 1.

* * *

Attention should be called to the excellent regional anthology recently issued by the University of Nebraska Press (in co-operation with Thomas Y. Crowell Co.) under the editorial direction of Lowry C. Wimberly, editor of **Prairie Schooner.** This volume, titled **Mid-Country,** contains the best work as gleaned from the files of the smaller magazines from Illinois to the Rockies and includes two stories originally published in RMR, "The Buck in the Hills" by Walter Van Tilburg Clark and "A Partnership With Death" by Vardis Fisher. Among the authors represented are Katherine Anne Porter, Caroline Gordon, Erskine Caldwell, Mark Van Doren, Paul Engle, John Peale Bishop, Ruth Suckow, Stephen Vincent Benet, Eudora Welty, Wallace Stegner, Robert Frost, and others less widely known. Fourteen of the contributors have appeared at one time or another in RMR.

* * *

Among contributors to this issue are several who have appeared several times in the past. Eric Russell Bentley, now a member of the English faculty at the University of Minnesota and an advisory editor of **Kenyon Review,** has appeared frequently since 1941, while Charles Neider was the author of our first EXAMINATION OF MODERN AUTHORS esay, on Thomas Mann, last summer. George Abbe has written verse for us, but this is his first appearance in RMR as a writer of prose. Byron Vazakas, Gil Orlovitz, and Bernard Raymund are old contributors. M. L. Nielsen, who translated "A Hunger-Artist," teaches German and Latin at Utah State College. He was recently appointed associate editor and wrote one of the book reviews in the Autumn number.

Celeste Turner Wright teaches English at the California College of Agriculture at Davis. George Anthony is from Boston and is at present working on a study of the letters of Baudelaire. Edward Hudiburg was born in Galveston, Texas, but he now lives in New York City.

* * *

Francis C. Golffing, formerly a resident of Ogden, Utah, has been discharged from the U. S. Army and is now in New Jersey.

* * *

Explanation should be made for the regrettable error which occurred in the last issue when the final line of Brewster Ghiselin's poem "The Dalian Plain" was inadvertantly omitted. The missing line reads: "Dark on the Dalian plain her long shadow."

EXAMINATION OF MODERN AUTHORS: 2

PIRANDELLO AND MODERN COMEDY

BY ERIC RUSSELL BENTLEY

Since the heyday of Shaw and Wilde no playwright has written first-rate drawing room comedies. The best have been by our Maughams and Behrmans and Bernsteins. Other writers have been turning from the formality of the drawing room towards a grotesqueness which, in its nearness to comedia del arte or to Aristophanes, may seem more primitive, yet which, in its psychological depth and intricacy, may well be more sophisticated. Strindberg himself sometimes achieved comedy by giving a quick twist to one of his own tragic themes. Frank Wedekind aimed at tragedy but by the novel method of using almost exclusively comic materials, thus reversing the technique of Strindberg's comedies. In Italy a whole school of dramaturgy, "Teatro del Grottesco," arose under the leadership of Luigi Chiarelli who said: "It was impossible in the years preceding 1914 to go to the theatre without meeting languid, loquacious granddaughters of Marguerite Gautier or Rosa Bernd or some tardy follower of Oswald or Cyrano. The public dropped sentimental tears and left the playhouse weighed down in spirit. The next evening, however, it rushed in numbers to acclaim a *verte pochade* like *Le pillole d'Ercole,* in order to re-establish its moral and social equilibrium." From Chiarelli's scorn for the New Drama, already old, of Dumas *fils* and Hauptman, Ibsen and Rostrand, came his own play *The Mask and the Face,* which was the starting point of a petty literary movement and of a great playwright, Luigi Pirandello. Rather than survey his voluminous and largely unknown works, let us examine one of his most widely-discussed pieces. *Right you Are (if you care to think so!)* has often been regarded as the quintessential Pirandello. Let us look into it. The basis of the play is some sort of *tragedie bourgeoise,* something that would have

stirred the audiences of the old-new drama which Chiarelli had laughed at. The domestic unhappiness of a husband, a wife, and a mother make up a tragic triangle. A commentator named Laudisi is the raisonneur a la Dumas.

The peculiar thing about the tragic situation in this domestic tragedy is that we do not know what it is: a fact that is as much second nature to Pirandellians as it is disconcerting to others. The peculiar thing about the raisonneur is that instead of giving us the correct view of the tragedy he tells us that all views are equally correct. But then, according to Pirandello, this is the correct view.

A man lives with his wife on the top floor of a tenement while the mother lives at his expense in a lavish apartment. The wife never leaves the tenement, and her mother never goes nearer the daughter than the street below from which she shouts up to the daughter. This state of affairs not unnaturally sets tongues wagging. Asked for an explanation, the husband says the mother is deluded. She thinks the wife is her daughter, though actually she is the husband's second wife. Her daughter, his first wife, died, though the mother dare not believe it . . . We are settling down to believe this version of the story when we hear from the mother an equally convincing version. The son is deluded. He never recovered from the delusion that his wife died, and they had to let him marry her again under the impression that she was another person.

Neither mother nor husband seems to have an axe to grind. Each is solicitous for the other's good. Each has a good reason for strange conduct. The mother needs to see her daughter often and must pay her visits. The husband must keep her in the street so that she shall not discover her error. Pirandello is at great pains to balance the two interpretations exactly, to tug our feelings now this way, now that, now up, now down, on the alarming switchback of his thinking. We may think ourselves on the right track, for example, when the husband, untrue to his story, is furiously angry with the old lady and tries to convince her that his wife is not her daughter. But, as soon as she leaves, his rage subsides. He was just play-acting, he tells us, to confirm her impression—so necessary to her peace of mind—that he is mad.

In the end the wife herself is summoned to unravel the mystery. She says: "I am the daughter of Signora Frola (the mother) and I am the second wife of Signor Penza (the husband)."

The raisonneur, who already had told us that there is no one true version of the story but that all versions are equally true, steps forward, and his peals of laughter end the play. Whereupon one school of critics praises Pirandello for his profound "philosophy of relativity," and another condemns him as "too cerebral"—only "mentally dramatic," as George Jean Nathan has it, *Right you are* being "written for intelligent blind men." The critical boxing ring would seem to be set for a bout concerning the drama of ideas.

Like Shaw, Pirandello has not been averse to the report that his drama is all intellect—no man minds being thought a mighty brain—and here are some of his words: "People say that my drama is obscure and they call it cerebral drama. The new drama posesses a distinct character from the old; whereas the latter had as its basis passion, the former is the expression of the intellect . . . The public formerly were carried away only by plays of passion, whereas now they rush to see intellectual works."

Such is the Pirandello legend. Around every great man there grows a legend which, whether fostered by himself or no, is always a distortion, sometimes a gross distortion of his real nature—if we may assume the existence of so un-Pirandellian an entity. The omission which I disingenuously made in the above quotation from Pirandello is a casual remark that happens to be more revealing than the pontificality of the rest. It is this sentence: "One of the novelties that I have given to the modern drama consists in converting the intellect into passion." Let us discount here the claim to originality. Strindberg had already perfected the art referred to. A succession of dramatists from Vigny on had announced a new drama of thought and intellect. The essence of Pirandello is not his intellectuality. It is his conversion of the intellect into passion. Perhaps Strindberg had done that too; it is the theory behind his naturalistic tragedies; yet in Strindberg passion summons intellect to work its will, while in Pirandello passion and intellect torture each other and join in a mutual failure. The quintessence of Pirandellism is a peculiar relation of intellect to feeling.

Ostensibly Pirandello's plays and novels are about the relativity of truth, multiple personality, and the different levels of reality. But it is neither these subjects nor—precisely—his treatment of them that constitutes Pirandello's individuality. The themes grow tiresome after a time, and those who find nothing

else in Pirandello give him up as a bad job. The novelist Franz Kafka was long neglected because his work also gave the impression of philosophic obsession and wilful eccentricity. Then another and deeper Kafka was discovered. Another and deeper Pirandello awaits discovery.

Before he can be discovered, the perpetual "cerebration" concerning truth, reality, and relativity, will have to be dismissed as the hocus-pocus that it is. At face value the argument of *Right You Are* is that, since both the mother and husband give a contradictory but equally plausible account of the same events, and since the daughter jumbles the two incomprehensibly, therefore there is no objectively true version of the story. This is a complete *non-sequitur.* All events can be reported in different ways. This might only mean that some reports must be wrong, not that there is no right view. There is actually nothing in the plot of *Right You Are* to indicate that there can be no correct version of the story. The unusual thing is that we do not know what it is. This is very Pirandellian not only, however, in that it is used to bolster a rather confusing, if not confused, discussion of truth but also because it leads us to what we might venture to think is the real Pirandello.

The wife's longest speech—of three sentences—is as follows: "And what can you want of men now, after all this, ladies and gentlemen? In our lives as you see there is something which must remain concealed. Otherwise the remedy which our love for each other has found cannot avail." The concealment which leads on the superficial, pseudo-metaphysical level to a discussion of truth is here very differently associated. There *is* a true version of the story but it must not be known lest the lives of the three people concerned be shattered. But, someone will protest, could not Pirandello use the prerogative of the omniscient author and tell *us,* without telling the characters, what the remedy is which their love has found? He could. But his refusal to do so is more to his purpose The truth, Pirandello wants to tell us again and again, is concealed, *concealed,* CONCEALED. It is not his business to uncover the problem and solve it for us as in a French *piece a these.* The solution of the problem, the cure for these sick human beings, is to leave their problem unsolved and unrevealed. The unmasker of illusions is at best a Gregers Werle, at worst one of the gossips of *Right You Are.* On the superficial level Pirandello is protesting against the spurious help-

fulness of the scandal monger, the prying reporter, and the amateur psycho-analyst; at a deeper level he is asking that the human soul be left a little territory of its own which also, perhaps, was one of the themes of Kafka.

As for dramaturgy, if the "remedy" were explained, the play would inevitably be built around this key to the whole problem. Pirandello could not afford—whatever the inducements—to have the emphasis so distributed. He wants to accent the refusal to search for a key. So he has his raisonneur argue that there is no key—an argument which sticks in people's minds as if it were the substance of the play. Actually the play is not about thinking but about suffering, a suffering that is only increased by those who give understanding and enquiry precedence over sympathy and help. Pirandello took from the "teatro del grottesco" the antithesis of mask and face, the mask being the outward form, the face being the suffering creature. At its crudest this is the theme of the clown with a tender heart. Already in Chiarelli the mask and the face had however the broader meaning of the social form identified with tyranny, and the individual soul which it sought to crush. In his best-known plays Pirandello elaborates on this antithesis. We see a central group of people who are "real." They suffer, and need help, not analysis. Around these are grouped unreal busybodies who can only look on, criticize and hinder. In *Naked,* which is the first Pirandello play to read since it does not lead one off on the false trail of relativity and truth, the mystery *is* dissolved, as in *Right You Are* it is not, and the result is the destruction of the protagonist. Note that this mystery, constituted by the illusions without which the heroine could not live, is not the Mask. The Mask is the social and anti-human tyranny of, for example, a novelist for whom the heroine's unhappy lot is grist to the mill. The Mask is the interference of the mechanical, the external, the static, the philosophical, with our lives. Thus not only the smug novelist of *Naked* and not only the disingenuous truth-seekers of *Right You Are* are the Mask. Pirandello himself—and every novelist and playwright—are the Mask. His material is the flux of suffering; his art stops the flow; its stasis is at once its glory—in immortalizing the moment—and its limitation, since life, being essentially fluid, is inevitably misrepresented by art. In drama life wears a double mask; the mask imposed by the dramatist and that imposed by stage production. Three plays are devoted to this fact. In the best of them — *Six Char-*

acters in Search of an Author – the three levels of reality are played off against one another throughout, and a fourth level is implied when we find one character judging another by what he happened to be doing on one shameful occasion, in other words by one isolated fact which, wrongly taken as typical, becomes a Mask on the face of the real man. What if all our characteristics are like this? Just as we found, Pirandello argues, that there is no objective truth, so we find also that there are no individuals. In the one case we have only a number of versions or opinions. In the other we have only a succession of states.

Exactly as in the matter of truth so in the analysis of character the extreme conclusion is a *reductio ad absurdum* too barren to be the real motive force of such powerful works as Pirandello's. His characters in fact are effective not in direct relation to these conceptions but because these conceptions enable him to suggest beneath the Mask of the physical presence the steady ache of suffering humanity. What a pessimist Pirandello is! says someone. Certainly. But again the point of Pirandello is not his philosophy – of relativity, personality, or pessimism – it is his power to hide behind an intellectual artillery barrage the great armies of warriors and the yet greater armies of non-combatants and refugees. Pirandello is a pessimist. So also must many of the little people of Europe be, little people who have lived through the extraordinary vicissitudes of the twentieth century, uncomprehending, passively suffering. Modern people are of course no more passive and uncomprehending than their ancestors. It is simply that they are more aware of their helplessness. Even as Proust speaks for the passive semi-aristocrats whom our new order has swept out of existence, so Pirandello, like Kafka, like Chaplin, speaks for the little man, not the aware and class-conscious proletarian but the unaware, in-between, black-coated scapegoat.

All this is in *Right You Are.* In a note to the director of the play one might write as follows:

"Make a marked distinction between the enquirers into the story, who are a sort of chorus representing what Pirandello regards as the Mask and the three "real people" involved in the domestic tragedy. The three are typical people of a middle-class tragedy in that they express grief and arouse pity without terror. Note how Pirandello's initial descriptions of the characters and his subsequent stage directions stress alike the genuineness and acuteness of their sufferings.

"Now the odd thing is that this wholly sad theme is placed in a satiric frame. Since this contrast, already familiar to you in the "teatro del grottesco," *is* the play, you had best be careful to secure the exact balance that is needed. The Three must act with unmitigated and uninterrupted pathetic force. But the Chorus — as we may call the other characters — must never enter into their sufferings. They must be as detached as a callous doctor at a deathbed. They must not, out of consideration of their Three colleagues, play down their own frivolity any more than the Three must soften their agony in order to come closer — as there is a natural tendency to do — to the mood of the Chorus. Only if the contrast between the two groups is kept sharp will you find that the effect of the grotesque is attained. Otherwise the effect will be blurred incongruity.

"You already understand how and why this bourgeois tragedy differs from tradition in not revealing its true nature. That is a primary irony which your production can point up in making the alternation of explanations go snip-snap. If the brilliance is not its own justification, your audience will regard all this as the lumbering preparation for a denoument that never takes place. An almost equally important irony is that between the celebrated "cerebral" dialogue of Pirandello and the deep agony which — as your Three must make clear — is the core of the action. This irony is more than the contrast between the Three and the others. The Three actually join in the intricate analysis of cause and effect, motive and act, which is the constant subject of discussion. The point is that these analyses are not 'coldly intellectual.' They are positively maniacal. (You might look up Pirandello's essay on humor where he maintains that the humorist takes a wild pleasure in tearing things to pieces by analysis.) By its maniacal quality the 'cerebration' enters into relationship with the agony, a relationship at once logical and psychological.

"You recall how in *Cyrano de Bergerac* Rostand rendered Hugoesque tragedy palatable by making it over into a tough-jointed comedy. The grotesque contrasts of *Right You Are* might be regarded as Pirandello's way of making bourgeois tragedy work — by making it over into a tough-textured comedy. Perhaps comedy is not the best word for such a play, but then you as a practical man are less interested in that question than in the correct interpretation of the play whatever its generic name. For you the significance of Pirandello's version of bourgeois tragedy

is that it sets the audience at a distance, preserving them both from tears and from boredom. Do not be shocked when they laugh *with* your Chorus *against* the Three or when they are amused with Laudisi when perhaps weeping would seem more in order. Their laughter is significant. For one thing it is what enables them to stomach the unmixed horror of the Pirandellian diet. It is not stupid laughter exactly. Pirandello has 'comedified' his tale. If the laughter he arouses prompts an unflattering interpretation of human nature, that is intended. The old theatrical business, at which you are adept, of mingling laughter and tears was never more calculated, more intricate, more meaningful, or more depressing than here.

"Accentuate then – do not soften – the clashes of sound and color of which the play is composed. If you let it work, you will find the whole thing ultra-theatrical. I should say: if you let *them* work, for a Pirandello play is made up of actors not of scenery. That must be why your friend Mr. Nathan thought it was written for blind men. But remember that actors – especially the actors of *comedia del arte* whose skill Pirandello wished to revive – once were, and can be again, the main part of the show. Let them throw their arms and legs about, let them swagger – in a word, let them act and talk instead of strolling around and muttering like mannequins with a pin loose. If they perform their roles from outside instead of pretending to *be* people who are not people Pirandello would be better pleased. As you know he called all his plays Naked Masks – not naked faces. Let your actors remember that. Naked Masks – a violent oxymoron indeed! Is not such a figure of speech a pointer, for you and the rest of us, to the strange genius of its author?

* * *

Shaw, Wilde, and Pirandello are the three great wits of the modern stage. All three in their different ways have achieved great comedy by playing an ironic counterpart against one of the stock tunes of commodity theatre or commodity literature. In their hands domestic tragedy, domestic comedy, adventure story, and farce are transmuted into an uncompromising critique of modern civilization. The old comic (and realistic) contrast between appearance and reality, between pretensions and actions, ideals and facts finds – in different ways – a restatement and thereby a new form and a new meaning. If the splendid, forthright dialectic of Shaw, the witty arabesque of Wild, and the

tortured, syncopated rhythms of Pirandello are, in a sense, new molds for old themes, the themes cannot themselves remain unaffected. Form and meaning are not independent. New form implies new meaning too.

What is new, what is modern, about modern comedy? Writers on earlier schools, in their *obiter dicta,* let us know that the early form that thay are discussing no longer exists. All they have to tell us about such comedy as does exist is that it can't hold a candle to the old stuff. Just as writers on Shakespeare seek to add to his glory by comparing him with Ibsen, whom they believe to be a sociologist, so writers on Restoration Comedy try to flatter their subject with a disparagement of Wilde or Shaw, whom they believe to be phrase-makers. Edmund Wilson was making a much more serious attempt to state a difference between Restoration Comedy and Shaw when he suggested that, where Restoration Comedy depended for its effect on the contrast between elaborate etiquette of expression and naked sensuality of motive, Shavian comedy depends on the contrast between expressed ideals and economic motives. Though Wilson's antithesis is too neat — the supposedly Shavian contrast existed, for instance, in Farquhar around 1700—it springs from a correct awareness that modern comedy reflects not only the surface but the structure of modern society. The Marxist analysis and the Shavian analysis of this society are identical not because Shaw is a follower of Marx but because both seek and find the dramatic contradictions of this revolutionary period. Our clever craftsmen of today, journalists or playwrights, perform an operation known as "dramatizing" their material, which is evidently regarded as *per se* dramatic. The real dramatist as Hebbel knew, as our Shakespeare scholars are beginning to learn, finds the dramatic elements in the society around him. In *Major Barbara* Marxian and Shavian dialect are one because the contradiction in Shaw's fable is the contradiction in capitalist society. Wilde and Pirandello, who make fewer pretensions to sociology, are not less socio-analytic. To re-read Wilde's collected works is to realize that Wilde was as angry and righteous as Carlyle, only that he chose the mask of a Bohemian rather than that of a curmudgeon. As much as Schnitzler or Chekhov he is the agonized witness of aristocratic decay. Pirandello's comedy is also distinctively modern. His subject is what might be called Twentieth-Century Blues, by which I mean not any particular, localized disillusionment such as that of the

lost generation of the twenties or that of ex-communists of today. I mean the disillusionment that is common to all these: disillusionment over failure, not so much of socialism or liberalism, as of humaneness itself in our time. In Pirandello's world there is only littleness and suffering. Perhaps it was the realization that littleness and passive suffering are untragic that impelled Pirandello to make comedies out of them. As comedies they are more moving.

The material in this excerpt — or in my book as a whole — is certainly insufficient to enable us to say: Modern comedy is thus and thus. One aspect of it that has already been touched upon, however, will be enough to clinch the point that modern comedy is modern. The master of a new comedy must know from what point of vantage to speak in our very unclassical society. I might instance Carl Sternheim as one who did not know, and Shaw as one who did know. Shaw speaks not, as Meredith thought the comedian should, on behalf of society as it is but on behalf of society as it should and could be. He speaks as rebel and, as we have noted, sets up between himself and his audience the relation of antagonism. Shaw's audiences simply *have* to laugh him off as a joker; their only alternative would be to shoot themselves. All this — and all important modern comedy — is contrary to Meredith's idea of comedy which is unzealous, unsatiric, very amenable. Of Byron, Meredith wrote: "He had no strong comic sense, or he would not have taken an anti-social position, which is directly opposed to the Comic . . Comedy, on the other hand, is an interpretation of the general mind, and is for that reason of necessity kept in restraint." Whether this view is truly classical or only Victorian it is certainly not modern. On the contrary, it is Byron's stand that lays down a precedent for the "anti-social" position which a writer of comedy must take up when he feels that society is rotten and the general mind corrupt. If Shaw is most evidently the comedian of a revolutionary period, Wilde, the Bohemian, is but a different sort of rebel in a mask, a rebel dressed up for a fancy dress ball. And Pirandello? Neither rebel, nor Bohemian, he declared that his home was a hotel room with a typewriter in it in any metropolis in the world. Something of a fascist in the head, Pirandello was at heart — a refugee. His point of vantage — it is a Pirandellian paradox — was that of an outcast.

Even as he wrote his comedies his mad wife was beating on

the door. Anything further from the elegant socialite of Meredith's image would be hard to imagine. As modern tragedy reached a kind of terminus in Frank Wedekind, modern comedy seems to reach a kind of terminus in Luigi Pirandello.

OCTOPUS

BY CELESTE TURNER WRIGHT

Eight feet from tip to tip, the label said
Streamlined, arms trailing, mantle fluttering
As currents vibrate; siphoning ahead,
Terrible with white pennons, triumphing.

Body a purse, lumps shifting as walls sag;
Spell on that pouch, bad medicine within;
Evil the mystery of flaccid bag,
Fetishes gliding knobbily in skin.

Muscular rhythm for a while; then rest,
Espaliered lifeless on the tank and stuck,
His tentacles outspread, his cuplets pressed
Against the glass with ridgy mouths asuck.

Eyes frosting over, and the branches bleached
As last year's snakeskins emptily afloat;
White, watersoaked, drowned long ago and leached
The wiliness of vampire in such coat.

Purpose betrayed in fringy fingerjerk
Exploring string of airbeads. Legend read:
Eight feet from tip to tip; life here at work;
Killer at large within the passive dead.

THREE POEMS

BY GEORGE ANTHONY

GYPSY SHOW

Marriages in the straw
Are laid for gypsy show.
Enchantment presides. The bride
Blooms to regicide.

Stockings filled with straw
Are Christmas to litmus friends.
Our peeper in the loft
Blesses our holiday sins.

Hawberries in the briars
Entice the starling eye.
The frost-edged beaks precisely
Decorate the tree.

Marriages in the straw
Conceive what folly spends.
The stocking toy, the sawdust boy
Are stuffed for Christmas friends.

THE SHARP KEY

"C'est d'une maladie de coeur
Qu'elle est morte."

So up the stairs and into bed
Privately she will wait.
Murder is an old trick
To riddle maidenhead.

Then on your knees and say your prayer
Word by word's mistake.
Murder's solitaire trump
Will take the lover's share.

And into bed, turn out the light,
Fold down its cradle wake.
Murder's incandescent hook
Electrifies your night.

Now stable down the breathing dark
Dream with the hooves of slate.
Murder is the sharp key
To lights about the heart.

Above those rickety dark stairs
Night by night translate
Murder to a lewd joke
Among your childish prayers.

TOAD

Like a toad murder
you hop from face to face
like a grin lighting
secrets and disgrace .
Like a toad blighting

marble indifference
of Venus you land
Under my frightened hand
when I caress
her daughter's breast.

Like a toad you ride
figleaves through my mind
and with your quick
reptilian humor flick
crumbs from the blind

beggars of violence.
Like a toad murder
you shine with jewelled brow:
my ugly child, rest now
in my trembling hand.

A HUNGER-ARTIST

BY FRANZ KAFKA

(Translated by M. L. Nielsen)

In recent decades there has been a distinct falling-off in the interest shown in hunger-artists. Whereas in earlier times one could stage such exhibitions at one's own expense and be quite sure of success, today such a thing is utterly impossible. Those were other times. In those days the entire city occupied itself with the hunger-artist; the interest in him grow from fast day to fast day; every one wanted to see the hunger-artist at least once a day, and in the latter stages there were regular subscribers who sat before the small latticed cage for days on end. On sunny days the cage was carried out into the open, and on these occasions it was especially the children to whom the hunger-artist was exhibited. But whereas for the adults he was often no more than a source of amusement, of which they partook only because it was the stylish thing to do, the children would gaze upon him open-mouthed, holding one another by the hand for safety's sake, as he sat there on his straw, scorning even so much as a chair, deathly pale, dressed in black tights, his ribs protruding powerfully, sometimes nodding politely and answering questions with a forced smile, even thrusting his arm through the bars to let them feel his emaciation, then lapsing once more into complete self-absorption and paying attention to no one, ignoring even the striking of the clock which was the cage's sole decoration, looking straight before him with eyes almost closed, and sipping occasionally from a tiny glass of water to wet his lips.

Besides the spectators who merely came and went, there were also regular guards chosen by the public — usually butchers, for some remarkable reason, and always by threes — to whom was assigned the task of watching the hunger-artist day and night, lest he might succeed after all in surreptitiously partaking of

nourishment. But that was no more than a formality, introduced to satisfy the masses, because the initiated were well aware that the hunger artist would never under any circumstances, not even under compulsion, partake of any nourishment during the period of fasting. His honor as an artist forbade such a thing. Of course not every guard could comprehend this. Sometimes there were groups of watchers who were very lax in their guard duty, who would purposely sit down together in a distant corner and absorb themselves in a game of cards with the obvious intention of allowing the hunger-artist a little refreshment which they seemed to believe he could produce from some secret supply. To the hunger-artist nothing was more painful than such guards; they filled him with unspeakable sadness; they made fasting terribly difficult for him. Sometimes he would overcome his weakness and sing during such a watch as this, sing as long as his strength held out, just to show the people how unjust were their suspicions. But it availed him little; in such cases they would simply marvel at the cleverness which enabled him to eat even while singing. Much more to his liking were the guards who sat down close to the cage, and not satisfied with the gloomy illumination of the hall, turned upon him the pocket torches with which they had been provided by the impresario. The bright light bothered him not at all. Sleep was impossible in any case, and he could always drowse a little, under any illumination and at any hour, even when the hall was noisy and overcrowded. He was only too willing to pass the night with such watchers entirely without sleep; he would put himself out to joke with them, to tell them tales of his wanderings or on the other hand to listen to their stories: anything to stay awake, to be able to show them again and again that he had nothing edible in his cage and that he was fasting as none of them could possibly do. But his happiest moment was when morning came and a sumptuous breakfast was brought to them at his expense, and he saw them fall upon it with the appetite of healthy men who had spent a tiresome night in wakeful watching. To be sure there were people who pretended to see in this breakfast an unseemly attempt to influence the guards, but that was going too far, and when they were asked whether they would be willing to take upon themselves the task of watching through the night for the sake of the thing itself and without the breakfast, they made a wry face, though they continued to harbor their suspicions just the same.

After all this was simply one of the suspicions unavoidably connected with fasting. Obviously no one was in a position to spend every day and night as a watchman at the side of the hunger-artist, and no one could be sure from his own observation that the fasting was really uninterrupted and complete; only the hunger-artist himself could know that, and so only he who was the faster could be at the same time a completely satisfied spectator of his fasting. And yet for another reason he never was satisfied. Perhaps it wasn't fasting at all which made him so emaciated that some people to their great regret had to stay away because they couldn't bear the sight of him; perhaps his emaciation came solely from his dissatisfaction with himself. For the fact was that only he and no one else, not even the initiated, knew how easy a thing it was to fast. It was the easiest thing in the world. He didn't keep it a secret either, but no one would believe him. At best people said he was modest, but usually he was accused of being a publicity hound or even an out-and-out fraud for whom fasting was easy because he knew how to make it easy, and who had the cheek on top of that practically to admit as much. All this he was forced to accept, he had become accustomed to it in the course of years, but inside him was the constant gnawing of dissatisfaction.

And yet never, never once at the end of any hunger period—this all were forced to admit—had he left his cage willingly. The impresario had set forty days as the maximum period for fasting, beyond that he would never let the fasting go, not even in the great world centers — and for a very good reason. Experience had shown that for about forty days, through the use of gradually intensified publicity, the interest of a city could be brought to an ever higher pitch, but that at the end of that time public enthusiasm began to wane and a marked decrease in patronage became apparent. There were of course minor differences in this respect from city to city and country to country, but the rule was that forty days was the maximum time. And so on the fortieth day the door of the flower-bedecked cage was opened, an enthusiastic audience filled the amphitheater, a military band played, two doctors entered the cage to carry out the necessary measurements on the body of the hunger-artist, the results were announced to the hall through a megaphone, and finally there came two young ladies, happy in the knowledge that they and no one else had been chosen for the task, whose duty it was to lead

the hunger-artist from his cage and down a few steps at the bottom of which stoood a tiny table set with a carefully-chosen invalid's repast. And at this moment the hunger-artist invariably rebelled. He was willing enough to place his bony arms into the helping hands which the young ladies extended as they bent over him, but he didn't want to stand up. Why stop just now, at the end of forty days? He could have borne it much longer, immeasurably longer; why stop just now, at the point when his fasting was at its best — no, not even yet at its best. Why did they want to rob him of the honor of fasting on, of becoming not only the greatest hunger-artist of all time, which he probably was already, but of surpassing himself beyond measure, for he sensed that there was no limit to his capacity for fasting. Why did this throng, which pretended to marvel so at his feat, have so little patience with him? If he could bear to go on fasting, why could they not bear with him? Besides he was weary, his seat in the straw was comfortable, and now they wanted him to rouse himself, stand up, and go to the meal, the very thought of which induced in him a nausea which he was barely able to suppress out of respect for the women. And he looked into the eyes of the women who appeared so friendly but were in reality so cruel and wearily shook the head which was so much too heavy for the fragile neck. But now there happened the thing which always happened at this point. The impresario would come, and silently — for the music rendered speech impossible — he would raise his arms over the hunger-artist as if inviting heaven to look down upon its work here upon the straw, this pitiful martyr — and martyr the hunger artist was, to be sure, though in an entirely different sense. Then he would grasp the hunger artist about his frail waist, trying as he did to make it obvious by his exaggerated caution with what a fragile object he was dealing, and, after surreptitiously shaking him a little and causing his legs to wobble and his body to sway uncontrollably, would turn him over to the ladies, who had meanwhile turned as pale as death. Now the hunger-artist offered no further resistance. His head lay on his chest, as if it had rolled there and somehow inexplicably stuck fast; his torso was cavernous; his legs, impelled by the urge to self-preservation, were pressed tightly together at the knees, and yet his feet scraped the earth as if it were not real, as if they were seeking the real one. And the entire weight of his body, light though it was, rested upon one of the ladies, who, breathless and

looking about imploringly for help (she had not pictured this post of honor thus), first tried to avoid contact with the hunger-artist by stretching her neck as far as possible, and then — since this availed her nothing and her more fortunate companion did nothing to help her, but simply contented herself with carrying the hand of the hunger-artist, a mere bundle of bones, in her own trembling hand — she broke into tears to the accompaniment of delighted laughter from the audience, and had to be relieved at her post by an attendant who had long been held in readiness. Then came the meal, a little of which the impresario managed to force down the half-unconscious hunger-artist, the while he chattered amiably to divert attention from his condition; then a toast was spoken to the public, which the impresario pretended had been whispered to him by the hunger-artist; the orchestra provided a mighty climax with a flourish of trumpets; the crowd broke up, and no one had the right to be dissatisfied with what he had seen, no one but the hunger-artist, always only he.

And so it went on for many years, with only brief intervals of recuperation. He lived in apparent glory, honored by the world, but for the most part filled with a gloomy melancholy which was deepened by the fact that no one understood it. And indeed what comfort could one offer him? What else could he wish for? And when sometimes a good-natured person appeared who felt sorry for him and tried to explain to him that his sadness was caused by the lack of food, it was quite likely—especially if the fasting period was far advanced—that the hunger-artist would answer by flying into a rage and terrifying all those around him by shaking the bars of his cage like a wild animal. But for such outbreaks the impresario had a method of punishment which he was very fond of employing. He would apologize to the assembled public on behalf of the hunger-artist and admit that his conduct could be pardoned only by understanding the irritability caused by fasting, an irritability which would be less easy to understand in a well-fed person; then he would lead logically to the equally understandable claim of the hunger-artist that he could fast much longer, and would praise the lofty endeavor, worthy determination and great self-denial which were evidenced by this claim. But then he would attempt to refute this claim simply by passing around photographs—which at the same time were offered for sale—in which one could see the hunger-artist on the fortieth day of fasting, lying in bed and so weak that he was on

the point of expiring. This perversion of the truth, so well known to the hunger-artist, and yet so unnerving when applied, was more than he could bear. That which was the effect of the premature ending of the fasting was here being set forth as its cause! Against this lack of understanding, this universal lack of understanding, it was impossible to fight. Each time he would stand at the bars and listen eagerly to what the impresario was saying, but always when the photographs were brought forth he would relax his hold on the bars and sink back onto the straw, and once more the reassured public could come near and view him undisturbed.

When the witnesses of such scenes thought back on them a few years later, they found it hard to understand themselves. For meanwhile the aforementioned transformation had taken place. Perhaps there were deep-lying reasons for it; but who was interested in seeking them out? At any rate, the pampered hunger-artist one day found himself abandoned by the pleasure-seeking multitude, which preferred to flock to other spectacles. Once again the impresario raced through half of Europe with him to see whether the old interest would not here and there manifest itself. But in vain; as if by some secret agreement a genuine dislike for fasting exhibitions had everywhere developed. In reality of course it couldn't have come as suddenly as all that, and now one tardily remembered certain warning signs which at the time, in the intoxication of success, had not been sufficiently heeded or sufficiently combatted—but it was too late now to do anything about it. To be sure it was certain that one day the time for fasting would come again, but for the living that was no comfort. What was the hunger-artist to do now?—He whom thousands had acclaimed couldn't put himself on display in the exhibition booths at small annual fairs, and for going into some other profession he was not only too old but above all too fanatically devoted to fasting And so he dismissed the impresario, the companion of a brilliant carrier, and hired himself out to a great circus. In order to spare his feelings, he did not even examine the terms of his contract.

A great circus with its huge throng of contrasting yet complementary men and animals and its masses of equipment can always find a place for another attraction, even a hunger artist—that is, if his claims are modest enough. But in this case it was not only the hunger artist who was engaged, but also his old and

well-known name itself. Indeed it wasn't even possible to say, in view of the peculiar nature of this art which showed no flagging with increasing age, that a superannuated artist no longer at the height of his powers had taken refuge in a quiet position with a circus. On the contrary: the hunger-artist gave assurance that he could fast as well as he ever could—a thoroughly credible claim—indeed, he even maintained that, if allowed to go his own way (a privilege immediately granted to him), he would only now for the first time set the world in justifiable astonishment, a claim which, in view of the temper of times, forgotten by the hunger-artist in his zeal, evinced no more than a smile from those who were in the know.

Actually, however, even the hunger-artist did not lose sight of the true state of affairs, and he was not at all surprised when he saw that his cage was stationed not in the middle of the circus as a feature attraction but out in the vicinity of the stables, a place which in its own way certainly was accessible enough. Large, gaily-colored signs surrounded the cage and proclaimed what was to be seen there. During the intermissions in the performances, when the crowds thronged to the stables to see the animals, it was almost unavoidable that they should pass by the hunger-artist and pause there for a little. Perhaps they would have stayed there longer had it not been for the fact that the people who were pushing impatiently from the rear in the narrow alley way, not understanding the reason for the delay on the way to the eagerly-awaited barns, made a longer and more leisurely view impossible. This explained too why the hunger-artist, though longing impatiently for these visits, which he naturally saw as his reason for existence, couldn't help feeling at the same time a certain apprehension. At first he could scarcely wait for the intermissions; he would note the approach of the throng with charmed anticipation; but only too soon he became convinced of the fact that again and again, without exception, they were on their way to the stables, and his experience in this matter overcame even the most stubborn, almost conscious self-deception. And this view of the throng from a distance continued to be the most agreeable one. For once they had reached his cage, he was immediately submerged in a sea of shouting, cursing people who formed ever-changing groups, one made up of those who wanted to view him at their leisure—not because they had any understanding for him, but simply impelled by a

whim or out of sheer willfulness (and these soon became for the hunger-artist the more unpleasant)—and the other consisting of those who were bent on getting immediately to the stalls. Once the great crowd had passed by, there would come the stragglers, and these of course, for whom there was no obstacle to stopping had they only felt the desire, strode by with hurried steps in order not to be late at the barns. And it was no more than a fortunate but infrequent stroke of luck when the father of a family would come by with his children, point to the hunger-artist, and explain in detail what it was all about; and he would tell about earlier times when he had been present at similar but incomparably finer exhibitions. But naturally the children, on account of inadequate preparation in the schools and in life, always remained without any understanding. What did fasting mean to them? And yet in the sparkling of their penetrating eyes they gave a hint of new and more merciful days to come. Perhaps, the hunger-artist would say to himself on such occasions, everything would be better if his station were not quite so close to the barns. It made the choice too easy for the people, to say nothing of the fact that the evil odors from the stalls, the restlessness of the animals at night, the sight of pieces of raw meat for the beasts of prey being carried by, and the screams of the animals at feeding time offended him and kept him in a constant state of depression. But he didn't venture to complain to the management; after all he owed to the animals the fact that he had so many visitors, among whom there might be now and then one destined for him. And who knew to what spot they might banish him if he reminded them of his existence, and of the fact that, when seen aright, he served only as a hindrance on the way to the barns.

A minor hindrance, to be sure, and one that was constantly growing smaller. People came to take for granted the novelty of having anyone demand attention for a hunger-artist in modern times, and this taking-for-granted spelled his doom. Let him fast with all the skill of which he was capable—and he did—but nothing could save him now, people simply passed him by. Just try to explain the art of fasting to some one! He who has no feeling for it simply cannot comprehend it. The beautiful signs grew dirty and illegible; they were torn down, and it occurred to no one to replace them. The little board showing the number of days of fasting achieved, which at first had been conscientiously changed, had remained the same for weeks on end, for the at-

tendants had grown weary even of this little task. And so the hunger-artist fasted on without hinderance, as he had once dreamed of doing, and was able to do it without difficulty, just as he had once predicted, but no one counted the days; no one, not even the hunger-artist himself, knew how great his achievement actually was, and his heart grew heavy. And if on occasion some idler stopped, ridiculed the old numbers on the board, and spoke of fraud, it was the most stupid lie which indifference and inborn malice could possibly invent, because it was not the hunger-artist who was cheating, he was doing his duty honorably, but the world was cheating him of his reward.

And yet more days passed, but that too had its end. Once one of the managers happened to notice the cage, and he asked the attendants why such a good serviceable cage with its putrid straw should be left standing unused. No one could say, until one of them, with the the help of the numbered board, remembered the hunger-artist. The straw was probed with poles, and inside they found the hunger-artist. "You're still fasting?" asked the manager. "When in heaven's name will you be done?" "Forgive me, all of you," whispered the hunger-artist. "Certainly," said the manager, and he pointed to his head with his finger to indicate the hunger-artist's condition to the attendants, "we forgive you." "I always wanted you to admire my fasting," said the hunger-artist. "And we do admire it," replied the manager obligingly. "But you shouldn't admire it," said the hunger-artist. "Well, then, we don't admire it," said the manager, "and why shouldn't we admire it?" "Because I have to fast, I can't help myself," said the hunger-artist. "Just listen to that," said the manager, "and why can't you help yourself?" "Because," said the hunger-artist, and he lifted his dainty head a little, and, thrusting his lips forward as if for a kiss, spoke directly into the manager's ear so that no word would be lost, "because I could find no food to my liking. If I had found it, believe me, I should have caused no stir, I should have eaten my fill just as you do, and all others." Those were his last words, but in his glazed eyes there remained the firm, though no longer proud, conviction that he was still fasting.

"Well, now clean things up!" said the manager, and they buried the hunger-artist together with the straw. And into the cage they put a young panther. It was perceptibly refreshing even to the dullest temperament to see this wild animal hurl

itself about in this cage which so long had been desolate. He lacked for nothing. Without any delay the keepers brought him just the kind of food he craved. And he appeared not even to miss his freedom. This noble body, healthy to the point of bursting, seemed in fact to carry its own freedom around with it (a freedom which appeared to reside somewhere in the region of its teeth); and its joy in living issued forth from its throat with such fierceness that it wasn't easy for those who watched it to stand firm. But they overcame their hesitation, crowded about the cage, and just couldn't tear themselves away.

TWO NOTES ON KAFKA

BY CHARLES NEIDER

I

As far as I know, the remarkable parallelism betweeen Franz Kafka and the nineteenth century Samuel Butler has never been discussed. A comparison of the two and their works illuminates each strikingly. At first glance they may seem to indicate greater differences than similarities, in personal as well as social temperaments. Butler's tendencies were toward science and rationalism, Kafka's toward philosophy and art. Butler was a rather arid character who haunted the British Museum and worried about posterity's appraisal of him; Kafka was feminine, poetic, chaotic and was so little concerned about posterity that he failed to finish his three major works and requested that they be burned after his death. Butler was the product of nineteenth century formalism; Kafka was a typical twentieth century character: neurotic and ironical and full of outward as well as inward turmoil. Butler had only a thin love for the accepted masters of art and for art in general and he cared little for the German masters, for example, with the exception of Handel, occasionally even sneering at Goethe and Beethoven (he distrusted the romantics and suspected anyone with a large reputation), while Kafka loved the romantics and revered Goethe. Butler belonged to the British world of science and materialism and flourishing empire of the nineteenth century while Kafka's world was the decadent, outmoded, bureaucratic and feudalistic world of prewar Austria, a world writhing with psychoanalysis and mysticism in revolt against the extremes to which nineteenth century rationalism had gone.

Yet in spite of these differences their patterns are basically similar. Butler barely escaped the life of a churchman,Kafka that of a lawyer; nevertheless the church plays a large role in

Butler's works and the law in Kafka's. Both men hungered for acceptance by the cabalism of their times and both were rejected; both, in consequence, retaliated through their works; and in doing so reproduced the cabalism in order to satirize them. In the process they portrayed the essense of cabalas with such a ring of truth and at the same time so ambivalently and allusively that they seemed to have created cabalas of their own when in reality they were merely giving vent to the scorn and bitterness of their rejection. The cabalisms they attacked were dissimilar—Butler lashed out at the cabalism of scientific professionalism and smug professionalism in general, Kafka at the social, ethical philosophical cabalism best symbolized for him by the bureaucracy with which he was so disastrously familiar—but the causes of their attacks were approximately the same: father-troubles resulting in feelings of inferiority, in the psychology of the outcast, which lent them the fresh view of the stranger pressing his nose against the window of contemporary life. Butler's attack was for the most part rationalistic (he was an island of rationalism in the romantic stream of nineteenth century English literature), while Kafka's was psychological.

As for the more apparent similarities, both men were lifelong and neurotic bachelors, both suffered from father complexes, both were ridden by feelings of guilt and inferiority, both had their major work published posthumously and both were the products of authoritarianism which found expression in the father. Butler, the product of Victorian rigidity and arrogance, revolted openly against his father and made his final and most exhaustive attack on him in *The Way of All Flesh.* Kafka, the product of Austrian feudalism, of a bureaucratic, paperwork empire, revolted negatively by withdrawing into a shell of pain and developing anxiety and guilt. Apparently Butler's father was more susceptible to direct attack than Kafka's, for he cut a rather ludicrous figure with his excessive discipline mixed with extreme sentimentality; on the other hand Kafka's father stood in Franz's eyes, for a long time at least, as the personification of extrovertive success and acceptance of and by the world.

In the works themselves there are numerous and fertile centers of comparison. To mention only one, there is the similarity between Butler's *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited* to *The Trial* and *The Castle* of Kafka. Butler comments on the problems of his day through the medium of fantasy, in which he has

an excellent opportunity to display his love of intellectual perversity, of turning things inside out. The two books are reminiscent of *Gulliver's Travels* in their caustic and shrewd examination of society. Kafka also uses fantasy to examine society and to exercise his love of *emotional* perversity. Thus he handles the subjective element of criticism, for in a sense he is more interested in effect than in cause, being primarily an artist rather than a thinker like Butler.

II

To Kafka, cabalism meant the secretive and superficial and cheap world of regularity that refused him entrance. When he spoke smilingly and enigmatically of "a secret cabala" in his works he meant, in my opinion, an attack on cabalism, an attack easily apparent in his works. Yet his friends and critics have almost unanimously accepted his words at face value, mainly because they were impressed by his interest in such mystics as Kierkegaard and his study of the Cabala and by his genuinely shy, poetic and "religious" nature; and they have proceeded to split hairs upon chimerical foundation almost as deliriously as the Court and Castle functionaries in Kafka's major works, *The Trial* and *The Castle*. But they failed to reckon with his profound skepticism and precisely with his fondness for the enigmatic; also his training as a lawyer and his ability to build up sound-seeming cases at the same time that he was secretly tearing them down. It is strang how esoteric critics strive to find philosophers in artists and artists in philosophers. Kafka is a man primarily of intuitions, emotions and images—an artist—who presented more vividly than anyone else certain aspects of his spiritual experience which are common to twentieth century man. He is not a thinker, nor did he pretend he was; and his works are in reality, for all their actual complexity, simpler than they have been made out to be.

One of the important discrepancies between Kafka's two major novels, a discrepancy which is perhaps more damaging to Kafka than any weakness of construction or even of conception, is that of psychology, since it is here that Kafka normally makes his greatest contribution. In *The Trial* one notes the wealth of subjectivismand is fascinated by the dream-distortion technique, the irrational and nuerotic, which are intimately revealed through the mind and reaction of Joseph K. These, in my opinion, are responsible for the novel's impact, its drama and its ex-

perential value. But one looks for them quite often in vain in *The Castle*, at any rate until the major and key chapter, fifteen, in which Olga relates her story to K. The result of this failing is that *The Castle* is a spotty book, a novel with a confused focus; consequently it is unsatisfactory emotionally. What are the causes of this discrepancy? First, while Kafka was interested in the K. of *The Trial* as an individual he was interested in the K. of *The Castle* as a device with which to view the village. Second, in *The Trial* he was concerned with individual psychology in relation to his theme, in *The Castle* with communal psychology, and third is more poorly constructed than *The Trial* from the point of view of what he was trying to accomplish.

The above distinctions between Kafka's purpose in these two novels are, as far as I can discover, a new note and for this reason they warrant further elucidation. Only by making these distinctions does it seem to me possible to understand and explain the discrepancy between the novels and the inconsistencies within *The Castle*. Without them one falls into the natural error of regarding both Joseph K. and K. as heroes. But this inference is fallacious. Joseph K. is a hero, for the action of *The Trial* revolves around him and the theme is based on him. But K. is little more than a device. The real hero of *The Castle* is the Barnabas family, which suffered the extremely unpleasant relations with the Castle and the village. Between this family and Joseph K. there is a real affinity but between K. and Joseph K. the kinship is only slight. To go a step further, there is a greater affinity between the Barnabas family and the villagers than between the family and K., even though the family are outcasts. The reason is that both the family and the villagers accept the cabalism of the Castle. The Barnabas family, like Joseph K., is convinced of its guilt. They worry not about the absolute state of things but only about the fact that misfortune befell *them*. As for K., he is the device of the outsider, used by the author to bring perspective and skepticism to bear upon the hypnotized people of the village. In this sense he is similar to Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain* and Tchitchikov in *Dead Souls*. In *The Magic Mountain* European society is the real hero, in *Dead Souls* it is Russian society. But beyond this there is no deep similarity, for both Mann and Gogol, unlike Kafka, profoundly explore the minds of their brain-children.

The Castle is, on the whole, a disappointing book, as I have

said. It rambles, is atomistic in construction and many of the conversations are overwritten and could have been replaced to advantage by meaningful action. At times Kafka contents himself with exploiting K. as a device with which to examine the village traditions and psychology through such people as the landlady, Frieda and the teacher but at others he turns his attention—but only skimpily—to developing the psychology of K. The communal psychology is interesting but it is presented only externally; therefore it is difficult to make the necessary identification with it. The result of all this is largely unfortunate. Yet it seems obvious that the problems which Kafka failed to solve were not beyond his powers. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that *The Castle* was the least finished of his major works and that he would have revised it extensively had he lived and cared to go on with it. Taken as it stands, however, it suffers from an ambivalence of focus and from poor construction; the two are interrelated. It develops along two parallel lines which should be interwoven —the line of K.'s attempts to reach the Castle and that of the village's domination by the Castle's cabalism. Confusion results; until chapter fifteen one effect cancels out another, leaving the reader quite bored. In addition the psychology of frustration is inadequately dramatized and in this too the novel falls short until chapter fifteen. And the wonderful, oppressive dream psychology is also missing in great part, so that too often the style limps along on the crutches of mere realism, something that Kafka can afford less than more conventional authors, since his chief distinction lies in presenting the truth by means of distortion.

It is strange that Kafka failed to exploit an obvious possibility for realizing unity, psychology and for infusing the novel with the kind of sardonic humor so satisfying in *The Trial*: *K.'s* profession of Land Surveyor. He could have placed K. at the mercy of the Castle's whims, had him survey wrong pieces of land with improper instruments which kept getting out of control, etc., and by this means have created a more subtle relationship between K. and the village, a dualistic relationship which he lacks: by arousing their sympathy for his failures and their disgust and condemnation for his refusal to give up his battle to reach the Castle. The theme could thereby have been developed more strikingly. He could also by this means have constructed the story around a single line of action, which would have simplified it and given it the direction it lacks. The village psychology

could then have been presented by implication rather than by windy and often fruitless dialogue. In the meantime K. could have been seduced by the village into an acceptance of the Castle cabalism.

On the other hand there are a number of aspects in which *The Castle* excels *The Trial* and which account for its relative popularity. The prose is of finer texture, more calm and pure, and the atmosphere is poetic. The characters are closer approximations to individuals than the types and symbols of *The Trial.* And the conception is on a more magnificent scale, with a sulky landscape playing an important role. *The Castle* is a rural novel, *The Trial* an urban one. Since the village serves as a microcosm *The Castle* is able to capture more truthfully the breath of social life. In addition, chapter fifteen is the most sustained and effective writing in Kafka. It is almost a book in itself. By sheer volume it dominates *The Castle*: it is 77 pages long in a book of 328, or almost a quarter of the entire work. The average chapter is only 18 pages long. I make the above points not only in an effort to illuminate the place of cabalism in Kafka's work but also to indicate how a close examination of a literary work, particularly with reference to the literary mechanism, can lead to a more precise understanding of the author's meaning, which in turn throws light on his technique.

As for *Amerika* and those stories, aphorisms and other odd bits which I have read, they only confirm the findings in Kafka's major novels, particularly his neurotic insistence on the irresolvable conflict, the projection of which undoubtedly released some of his own trapped emotional energy. *Amerika* is a rather dull, rambling novel whose intention is obscure and whose psychology is without distinction except in rare moments. Its main value lies in its being Kafka's first projection of his theme in novelistic terms and a major attempt to portray his emotional perversity in psychological as well as aphoristic and intellectual terms. The stories are interesting, some even fascinating, but they lack the plasticity of the novels. Besides, they are more closely allied to the simple fable or fantasy, they do not in general possess the remarkable power of inducing in the reader the ambivalent and trapped feeling of the neurotic, something that the novels succeed in doing only because of the eerie flirtation between distortion and realism which is characteristic of dreams.

DRY WINTER

BY BYRON VAZAKAS

Although the trees are webbed with
fog, the tulip lights along
the bridge release the winter
night's predicament. Tear-lined

Bark, rain-furrowed faces, night
the dark mind proposes the
extravagant gestures of these
branches as though they suffered

More than the day could see. So
much of this landscape has been
used by others, yet becomes for
me what it was for them, and more

So: this old malady of the mind that
hordes and hurts, continues to
absorb the painful thoughts and
furtive acts until all that this

Place endured becomes habitual. It is
not as though the consciousness
were drugged by snow: but on these
slopes the iron-black stones gape

Back the small injustice and the petty
spite, the dangling epithet, and
the sleepless night fallen to
remembering in a clot of leaves.

This desolate place is a kind of
disorder that recurs, as pain
repeated acknowledges disease;
and the half-dead fibers of the

Undergrowth tangle like tissue in the
brain, and the brain responds.
Conditioned by the weather of the
mind, the season's fingers close

On me, and I am no longer warmed
against the winter's will, but
keep my winter, as the boughs
retain their grey beneath
A summer's green; and keep anxiety
like a mist hovering above the
maladies of the past, the barriers
of fear, guilt presupposed.

TWO POEMS

BY GIL ORLOVITZ

FOR MY COUSIN: KILLED IN ACTION: PACIFIC: 1945

Curled carbon, flesh blacked by his time of years
summed up by his time of suns in scarlet platinum
converge of blaze upon him, eternity ever
both steelcased and exploding on man, the swift
rubber-whip death, struck and recoiled, the bull-lash
of it cut out of the hot blue black circus of somersaulting
planes and sky, and the stinging curt cackle of retraction
against the belly of the past dead, leaving the onlookers
with their lives hanging agape and white this instant,
while on the disembowelled medusa-scalp
of deck the mortal glue of cells death-sexed
to nuclei of smoky air, Sir Sirloin
messed and ruined, curled carbon is the youth,
a fist of nightsoul stinking, its fatty hunchbacked
knuckles still grease-sizzling for your remorselessly revolving
spit of memory.

OBSERVATION ON CONQUERORS

Heels up! was the crowdeye's knot
on histories, and ropedesire jerked
their tails up to the girder:
the dead dried fish swayed
and dunked in the wind's easy wash,
and sunset shod them with grey
blue scales. And then the people
slow puffed on the pipe of stare,
and smoked, as they have smoked
all other times, to the final
core of time's tight and swinging
hemp.

BOUQUETS FOR HIERONYMOUS BOSCH

BY EDWARD HUDIBURG

1.

The neutral landscape of a dream is strange,
Color subtracted gives the eyes new range.

Censure, the nettle, dug out like caries,
The spectrum alters and emotion varies.

The hands are not compelled yet they are true,
And what provokes the foot is not the shoe.

And none may qualify the dreaming word:
Lips speak, words spoken stay unheard.

The million tides within the blood are hushed:
Single and halt the heart moves when it must.

There on the free plain where the naked rest,
The equal island of the damned and blessed,

Foregather exiles from all other shores
And undisputed angels lie with whores.

A damsel with averted name parades
Dim terraces, a donzel shows and fades:

And should a kiss turn them androgynous
They do not surfeit but are generous.

Specters pass too, unplanned component things,
Odd as a griffin and not wearing wings:

Should the touch and hand be of your mother,
The ancient wish wears costume of another.

2.

Who rides a dolphin home to rest
Will find the dolphin has no nest
And fanciful and full of whim
The dolphin knows no rule from him:
But all-wise in the ways of seas
The dolphin there himself will please
To sport within his element
And make his liquid sacrament.
Riders of dolphins fail and fall
If they dwell at home at all:
Mermen, mermen ride them single,
Those that air and water mingle.

THE BELL

BY GEORGE ABBE

The Reverend Julius Fern was surprised, one cold December day, to discover a solitary figure standing before the small, windswept church at the top of Christ's Hill. He approached, and saw it was a young man looking up at the steeple, one arm extended in a peculiarly arrested position with the hand clenched. His head was far back, there was a strange rigidity about his whole body.

Julius Fern did not hesitate, or give the young man warning; he came up swiftly and said in a quick, harsh voice:

"What is it? Is something the matter?"

Startled, the young man turned and the minister saw it was Hamilton Witsburg, a newcomer in the community. He knew little of him except that he had worked for many years in factories, that he was a morose and lonely individual, seldom speaking except when angered.

"Oh! It's . . . It's you, Mr. Fern . . ."

Hamilton Witsburg did not smile, and the minister now observed that there was a strange tightness about his lips, and even in the failing light, he could detect an overpowering fear in his eyes.

There was no one, no one else at all on Christ's Hill. There was the one church there, the Methodist church, the one Mr. Fern preached in. And past it, a hundred yards or so, was the parsonage where Mr. Fern lived. Those were the only buildings on the hill. Seldom were people seen there, except on Sunday. Of course, there was the graveyard across from the church—and Mr. Fern and his wife sometimes found it better company than none.

Now as he observed this extraordinary young man—the obvious tension and fear in his manner—Mr. Fern softened his tone to a professional mildness.

"Can I do anything?" he asked.

Thereupon, Hamilton Witsburg, speaking in a wild and broken voice, told how he had always had a terror of high places; and sometimes he would walk past a cliff or a high building and be so hypnotized by that which he feared, that he would stand and stare at it and be unable to move for a long while.

Now, it was perfectly evident that this young man, scarcely more than a boy, in spite of the ugly, adult-looking scars across his face—scars made by flying pieces of steel—that he was in a deep and terrible mood, that this was the first time, perhaps, that he had poured out this trouble.

"'You can see." he cried. "I can't help it, and that's why I look at the steeple. I've been here for a long time, looking at it. All I can think is—I want to climb it; I want to climb it. But I don't dare. I don't dare."

But Mr. Fern, though he was a minister of God, felt no emotion but discomfort. He recalled how his wife had suggested to him, only a few weeks ago that he go and visit that newcomer, Hamilton Witsburg; and he had replied:

"No; I have heard he is an engineer and is working at the Army airfield in Kepton. You know Maria, that the Army people never stay in one place more than a month or so. It would be a waste of time. Besides, I am so busy."

Mr. Fern felt uncomfortable as he remembered this. He stepped closer and remarked, in what he considered a friendly voice:

"Of what faith are you, Mr. Witsburg? Wouldn't you care to come to our service some Sunday?"

Hamilton Witsburg drew back, and again his hands were knotted into fists; but this time he laughed—rather strangely.

"No," he said, "Thank you just the same."

The Reverend Julius Fern was puzzled. For a moment he bowed his head, trying to think of something apt, something appropriately thoughtful. Then he glanced up at the long, slender spire of the church—the bell tower, very sharp against the far pink glow of the sunset, and the weathervane, riding graciously on tides of blue air.

"Afraid to climb?' 'he said, and he murmured something absentmindedly. The steeple did look very high; naturally no one, other than a worker properly prepared, would really think of climbing it; in this young man's mind, it could be no more than a

symbol. But now, for the first time since he had come to the parish four years ago, he noticed a steel cable running from the ground up to the bell tower.

"Of course, there is that cable," he said, "But it seems to me."

Then, something lashed into his mind—something he had read in a book called *Conquerors of the Spirit*. Another minister had given it to him, and in order to please his colleague, which was essential if he were ever to get transportation from this lonely place to conventions and city events, he had read it carefully. Now, that reading he had forced himself to do—it was coming in handy, after all!

"Mr. Witsburg," he said, and he placed a hand on his arm. "Such timidity is always needless. Call on your spiritual resources. You remember the quotation—'The Lord casts out fear.'"

Mr. Fern lowered his voice:

"I have just been reading about Ralph Waldo Emerson in a book called *Conquerors of the Spirit*. He had an aunt who said to him: 'Always do what you are afraid to do.'"

The Reverend Julius Fern stood there a moment, looking into the young man's face, allowing his words to sink in. Then he went on across the darkening lawn to the seclusion of the parsonage.

For some time after the minister had left him, Hamilton Witsburg remained motionless, looking at the parsonage window, where a light had come on and was now burning with a warm golden softness. Then he looked up at the steeple. Behind it the stars could now be seen, silver and crisp, and a cold wind was beginning to swing in from the northwest, stirring the weathervane. Down in the valleys, far off, to every horizon, the hills rolled, purple and black, with the pricks of light from windows of homes.

With a sudden stiffening of his face, Hamilton Witsburg walked to the side of the church and took hold of the cable. Wound strands of steel, tough and cold to his touch; yet it was thin and flexible. Hand over hand he went up. Many years of lifting and bending and holding metal bars against machines had made him strong. His arms did not tire, but his mind began to grow taut and there was a sensation like a bell buzzing all along his spine. The back of his head became hot; his scalp semed to draw together and prickle.

With his teeth set, he pulled himself up. Kicking out now

and then, he found the wall of the church with both feet, and braced himself there, to gain a brief rest. Once he glanced out at the horizon, then down at the ground. A giddiness caught him and he closed his eyes. In his own ears his breath sounded huge and fateful, like the lungs of an engine pulling interminable freight through a tunnel.

Now his hands began to burn from the friction with the steel cable. Steel, he thought, steel, . . And he remembered the factories he had worked in—high up, among girders and in cranes. He thought of the scars in his face, made by flying fragments of steel. And now he began to tremble even more violently, and he closed his eyes and braced his feet against the wall of the church again.

For a moment he gave in to his fear; he began to go down again. Then, with a wrenching sensation in his brain, the words of the minister came back—

"Always do what you are afraid to do."

Hamilton Witsburg opened his eyes and looked up at the spire of the church, outlined against the winter sky. That sharp needlelike whiteness seemed to pierce him—as the words of the minister had.

He cursed in a loud voice, and drew himself up again, hand over hand. All along his body the sweat was running, and he could hear his teeth gritting and the horrible volume and roughness of his breathing.

He was almost to the bell-tower roof now. At the roof he could gain footing, and climb into the bell-tower.

The Reverend Julius Fern thought he was something of a psychologist. Sitting in his comfortable study, he took down from the shelf a copy of *How to Control the Mind,* and leaned back in his chair with a sigh. Perhaps, he thought to himself, with a certain degree of pride—perhaps I used the correct method in dealing with that young man. Of course, he did not seriously contemplate climbing that particular steeple. In his mind, it was only a symbol. But it might have been a deep-rooted complex. And later on, in certain small ways, he may put my suggestion into execution.

His wife called him from the living-room.

"Julius! Julius!"

He shivered, and put down his book. How he hated that voice!

"What is it, Maria?"

"Will you bring down my packing boxes from the attic?"

"Tonight? But Maria . . .!"

"Yes, . . . Tonight! I must be ready for tomorrow in case I feel I must leave . . . "

"But the cold . . ."

"Julius! Do you want me to die of pneumonia? Do you want people to say of you. . . . ?"

"Oh, all right," he groaned.

He stood up wearily. The poise and self-sufficiency had dropped from him. A dull and hopeless anger burned in his eyes. If only he dared to defy her, to answer back—to overthrow, once and for all, that tyranny, But . . . well . . . it was her money, after all, that had kept them alive all these years. No one could have kept from starving on his meager pittance of a salary—but these country jobs did, after all, allow more spare time for a man. . . .

"Yes, Maria. I'll go up."

On the way to the cold front hall, the telephone rang. He stopped, and answered.

"Yes. Oh, hello. How do you do, Mr. Willby."

Maurice Willby was on the Board of Trustees, one of the most prosperous of the church leaders.

"Mr. Fern," he said, in a tone of forced deference, "We appreciate the integrity of your motives, but we feel it is impossible to take any action against Mr. Starret at this time. After all, he has led a life, as far as we know, which is, if you take into consideration . . ."

And the voice of Mr. Willby went on and on. The minister listened with anger, and then despair. William Starret had carried on some illegal and immoral practices in the community which had resulted in the deaths of two people. He, the minister had urged the church to take official notice of it.

This was the answer.

He knew why he was being refused. William Starret, who was extremely well-off, contributed too much to the support of the church.

Now, thought the minister, now is the time to tell Mr. Willby what I think of him and his pack of lecherous wolves. Ever since I came here they have driven me and browbeaten me. Why not tell Maurice Willby *Now,* that I shall take this matter in my own hands and give William Starret a public censure on my own responsibility!

But the time came for him to answer, and he heard himself saying, in his most cordial voice:

"Yes, Well, I suppose, Mr. Willby, that you and the other trustees may know certain factors in this particular matter which were not open to me, and, of course, if you say it is the only thing we can do, well, then. . . ."

And after he had assented to the decision of the board, the Reverend Julius Fern went into the cold front hall and up the stairs to the attic.

Meanwhile, the young man had gained the roof of the bell-tower, and trembling and weak in every limb, he lay for a while, face down on the roof, clinging at a steep angle, to regain his strength.

Slowly, a sense of gratification entered him, and then incredulity. Had he, after these past years of horrible fear, overcome it to this extent? Had he climbed this high? He did not dare to look down at the ground. He was afraid that, in spite of his resolution, the nerve centers of his control would snap; the earth and the stars would spin, and he would tumble in long guesome arcs, down and down.

Something inside him, told him to go back now, while he had time, while he was still alive, before he reached too great a height. Something told him he was defying Providence. But he remembered the words of the minister, and the anger at his own weakness that had rankled in him for long, burst forth to the brink of his mind and made him curse:

"You fool! Get up and fight it. *Do* what you fear. Are you a coward?"

And he lifted himself slowly and crawled up the steep roof, under the cold winter stars, with his hands numb and his limbs trembling. Then he came at last to the low wooden railing around the bell-tower, which was open on all sides. And he lifted himself to a standing position, with one hand pulling him up, first to the railing, then to a pillar of the bell-tower. Down below him in the tower, far down, he could see the bell, extremely huge and black, hanging silently from its big beam.

He felt a great surge of exultance. He had come this far—he, the coward! He had done what the minister had told him was the only. . . .

Then, suddenly, in the midst of his triumph, Hamilton Witsburg looked out at the world around him; he looked down.

And the sudden sensation that engulfed him, the paralysis that deadened his brain, was something he could not reason with or control. In fact, he scarcely knew that he had ever felt it. The world and the sky revolved before him; he put out a hand blindly, and fell—not down the steep roof, but over the low railing into the bell-tower. He went down. . . down . . into a well of darkness with the trout flicker of starlight in it—he fell forty feet, turning over and over.

He cried out, but no one heard him; and his thrashing arms only brushed the wooden wall of the tower. His head struck the huge bell; his body was deflected and crushed, driven between the bell itself and an iron abuttment, wedged tight.

The next morning, Sunday, the Reverend Julius Fern, who was punctuality itself, noticed that the church bell did not ring at its acustomed time. Frowning and muttering to himself, he crossed the broad frozen lawns of the parsonage and stepped into the freezing entryway of the church.

There stood Henry Beasly, the janitor, looking perplexed.

"I pull it. I pull it as hard as I can. Nothing happens."

Mr. Fern followed Henry Beasley to the upper Sunday School room, back of the choir loft. He took hold of the bell rope and pulled it; he hung his full weight on it.

The bell seemed to budge very, very slightly; but something thick and resistant seemed to be preventing its true motion.

"We shall have to let it go," said Mr. Fern. "Tomorrow we can send someone up to examine it. The people will come anyway."

And, indeed, the people did. In spite of the cold weather, they made a good showing, and the Reverend Julius Fern preached with vigor, something almost akin to joy.

His text was: "Launch out into the deep." And he spoke of the need for daring and enterprise; how the Lord will cast out fear. He was very careful to avoid the eyes of his wife, who sat near the front of the church—but then, he always avoided his wife's eyes as much as possible. And he even forgot that Mr. Willby was in the congregation, regarding him skeptically.

Some inner part of him seemed to want to thrive on this crisp, invigorating December air, the hills that could be seen so far and clear through the high windows of the church.

He became eloquent in his sermon. His face shone. For an illustration, he used the case of the young man in the village

whom he had met outside the front of a tall building—he did not tell them it was a church—the young man whom he had urged to do what he feared most to do. He inserted some recondite remarks about psychology, thinking with satisfaction that his people would be impressed.

But, at the very moment when he was addressing his congregation, Henry Beasley, worried by the peculiar irresponsiveness of the bell, was thrusting open the trap door into the bell tower. He stepped up gingerly into the narrow space below the bell; he looked up. What he saw stunned and horrified him.

Hamilton Witsburg was wedged between the bell and the abuttment; he could not move, but he was conscious. His head and shoulders were twisting back and forth above his trapped torso; one leg, crumpled under him, seemed broken. His mouth wide open and working with grotesque desperation, made no sound at all.

When Henry Beasley regained sufficient presence of mind, he scrambled down the ladder and ran, stumbling and striking against objects in the semi-darkness, to the door of the choir loft. The minister was just finishing his sermon when the astonished choir heard the loud sound of running, and saw Mr Beasley, staring, face drained of color, burst in upon them.

"Quick!" he cried. "The bell! . . . Something terrible. . . ! "

• • • •

The Reverend Julius Fern visited Hamilton Witsburg frequently in the hospital: he seemed deeply distraught, almost frightened by what had happened: he murmured to his wife:

"What was the man doing up there? What was he thinking of?"

And to himself he thought: He couldn't have been fool enough to take me literally!

Hamilton Witsburg did not recover from the blow that had numbed his nerve centers and deprived him of his power of speech. He lost strength and the will to live slowly. Julius Fern spoke to him often, and entreatingly, but he did not seem to hear. The shock of his experience lived in his wide, incredulous eyes like a stone too brightly burnished. People talked kindly to him; doctors worked over him. Yet he died.

The Reverend Julius Fern went home and sat in his study and reflected upon it. He closed the door of his study and sat

down slowly and heavily in his leather chair, and leaned back. His eyes seemed tired and tragic as he lifted them. As though partially paralyzed himself, he looked about the room, at the familiar objects.

Then he took from the shelf of his tall, inset bookcase, the copy of *How To Control the Mind,* settled in his chair, and began to turn the pages aimlessly, frowning and shaking his head with gentle sorrow.

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BOOKS

THE UNKNOWN PENINSULA

BY BERNARD RAYMUND

The publication of the two new Emily Dickinson volumes in 1945* discloses what is probably the worst rape of our inheritance. Fifty-nine years after the death of the poet we learn from Mrs. Bingham that something over a thousand of Emily Dickinson's poems had lain all this while unpublished. At least four hundred more remain to be transcribed and published, probably more, since Mrs. Bingham does not know what manuscript was left by Emily's niece nor can she get access to it. And this has been made possible by the impossible, yet wholly feminine feuds between Emily's surviving sister Lavinia and her sister-in-law, Sue; these deteriorating relations in time involving Mrs. Mabel Loomis Todd chosen by Lavinia to edit her sister's poems and in the end incontinently kicked out.

Now in the course of this battle it is probable that no harm has befallen Emily herself. She could afford to wait for her public: perhaps she has a larger public because she has waited. But that our literature is the better for the delay nobody can believe. Suppose *all* of Emily's work beginning with the publication of the first volume in 1890 had been given to the public in annual doses as planned. Better, instead of being discouraged by her friend and literary maiden-aunt, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, she had been actively supported in the publication of her work in her own life time. Is it an exaggeration to surmise that one of the most sterile eras in our creative existence would have been freshened and quickened? that idols would have been overturned that on the contrary lingered into the next century? that high-school texts of "literature" and "home books of verse" would not now omit the most significant name in that period?

*'ANCESTORS' BROCADES, The Literary Debut of Emily Dickinson. By Millicent Todd Bingham. Harper & Brothers. New York, 1945; BOLTS OF MELODY, New Poems of Emily Dickinson. Edited by Mabel Loomis Todd & Millicent Todd Bingham. Harper & Brothers. New York, 1945.

It is a surmise I like to make; and as I read this book by Mrs. Bingham, surely the literary thriller of the year, I am angry that such did not come to pass, that the savageries of Yankee womanhood prevented the flowering of genius, not in our prosperous day, but at a time when it was most needed. Letters, no less than utilities, should have a "right of eminent domain" whereby masterpieces can be made public property instead of remaining the spoils of female legatees.

Mrs. Bingham has traced with filial affection her mother's labors in transcribing Emily's tumultuous manuscript and the even greater difficulties in choosing among the many variants that Emily suggested in almost every line. But she does not succeed in wholly absolving her mother from complicity in what we might term *the* literary scandal of the last century. The clever, witty, talented wife of Amherst's astronomer could surely have hit upon the feminine strategy necessary to win Sue Dickinson's cooperation. In the end her active partisanship of Lavinia served her ill indeed. And when rifts began to appear in her relationship with Lavinia, was it the part of wisdom for Mrs. Todd to widen them by her, oh so merry quips, and oh, such delicate ridicule? Was the publication of the Letters helped or hindered by Mrs. Todd's violently proprietary attitude toward them? The record, I think, is clear that if her attitude toward Austin Dickinson had been less affectionately possessive, if she had desisted from using Austin to put various pressures upon Lavinia, the unfortunate lawsuit that severed her connection might never have transpired with the Dickinson family. And after all why did she contest the suit at all? Why endeavor to keep a piece of ground that in the event could have been of no value to the Todd family? These are questions the male mind simply cannot fathom.

The death of all the participants has made it possible for Mrs. Bingham to tell the whole history of Martha Dickinson Bianchi's collection of Emily's poetry, her various, and inaccurate, volumes of biography, her unacknowledged use of letters first published by Mrs. Todd and Colonel Higgenson. What Mrs. Bingham does not, and cannot, tell is how Gilbert Dickinson came into possession of such a mass of Emily's manuscript. If Emily meant her sister Lavinia to have exclusive rights (and we have only Lavinia's word for it) how did it happen that Mrs. Dickinson had duplicate copies of practically every poem published by Mrs. Todd? Lavinia declared her sister-in-law had stolen them.

Mrs. Bingham valiantly attempts to show that her mother's versions of many poems are superior to those published by Mrs. Bianchi. But the reverse is just as often true: some of the worst versions, evidently "prettified" by Emily in the hope of finding periodical publication, were found in the camphor-wood chest with the musical lock that Mrs. Todd bequeathed her daughter. And when Mrs. Bianchi issued the *Further Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1929) Mrs. Todd surprised her daughter by declaring they were all genuine, that all had been at one time or another copied by her from Emily's manuscript given her by Lavinia. That New England feuds and the untimely death of Lavinia and Austin prevented their publication long before is our tragedy, even more than Mrs. Todd's.

Mrs. Bingham hopes that "by telling the story I have added to an understanding of" Emily Dickinson. I wish this were so, but reading *Bolts of Melody* leads to questions that her able collection of biographical data, photographs, facsimile manuscripts, fails to answer. In the letters she quotes from Lavinia to Mrs. Todd and others, one comes upon images that for violence and fixity might have been coined by Emily herself. There is the same pungency of phrase, the same abrupt turn of thought. One says, that must be a family trait. But what, in Emily, stepped the potential up to poetry? What, in that conservative household, supported her in a defiance of all current prosodic conventions? Barring certain deviations noted above, Emily's verse has a hardness, a texture that cannot be explained by any "influences" current in the age of the "effusion." Biography does not teach us where she found the skill to use words as pliant, glittering instruments in a day when they were regarded as convenient cushions between the reader and the blows of reality. Her respect for her vocabulary knows no bounds and it serves her with reciprocal devotion. And as so often in the case of genius this is true from almost the first. When she really began to write, instead of copy, this is the way she wrote. The smallest fragment bears her signature. And though Mrs. Bingham believes the later lyrics, the 'scraps' that her mother put aside, are stronger than her earlier work, this is true only insofar as the poet is less inhibited. Take for instance the lines,

> *"Some we see no more, tenements of wonder*
> *Occupy, to us, though perhaps to them*
> *Simpler are the days than the supposition*

Their removing manners leave us to presume.

That oblique belief which we call conjecture
Grapples with a theme stubborn as sublime,
Able as the dust to equip its feature,
Adequate as drums to enlist the tomb."

Clearly because of its more flexible form, its richness in images that obsessed Emily throughout her closing years, this can be accepted as one of her later poems. But is it any more expert than this early poem?

"This slow day moved along
I heard its axles go
As if they could not hoist themselves
They hated motion so.

I told my soul to come,
It was no use to wait,
We went and played and came again—
And it was out of sight."

Now however much we may praise "tenements of wonder," "removing manners," "That oblique belief . . . we call conjecture," and the tumult of metaphors in the last two lines, does it ring any clearer, any louder, any more distinctively Emily's than the figure of the "axles" in the second whereby the day "hoists" itself with such a hatred of motion? Her figures leap, they walk from birth, they always did, from the time she stopped writing Valentines a la Tom Moore to her acquaintances. Readers of the nineties searched her poetry not in vain for transcendental references and for religious feeling (or in some quarters, for its reverse). At her "revival" in the Twenties reviewers rhapsodized over her "childlikeness" and inferred the influence of William Blake, of whom, as is clear from her correspondence, she had never heard. We in our day seize upon such lines as "The sun engrossed the east", "Republic of delight", "Noon is the hinge of day", "A stealing that is not a stealth", "Shot the lithe sleds like shod vibrations", "the marrow of the day", "Like gentle infamy" (the list can be prolonged indefinitely) as witness to an intelligence almost predatory. It is tantalizing to speculate what posterity will find that we have overlooked.

Emily's first editors corrected her spelling, supplied punctuation, tampered with the off-rhymes that we find so apposite.

For her grammar they could only groan. But the fact is that while Emerson and Thoreau in their excursions into verse continually barked their shins on syntax (we think none the worse of them for that), Emily invented a whole syntax of her own. Its chief mechanism is the ellipse by which she is able to ignore subjects, form collective predicates, and above all omit at will verbs, so that singular subjects appear to take plural verbs. The same result is achieved by her "latent subjunctive." Sometimes the syntax is so intricate that it spoils the poem for us, but it is eminently adapted, so I presume to think, to the working of the female mind. So that when we say that this female poet or that reminds us of Emily Dickinson our tribute is not so much to the matter as the manner of speaking.

The syntactical peculiarities increase in the later poems, written in pencil, or rather practically printed, on the backs of grocery bills, the inside of used envelopes, wrappers from student-lamp chimneys. (Why does Mrs. Bingham ignore the evidences of arthritis in the Dickinson family, with fatal cardiac involvement?) Peculiarities is hardly the word, the fact being that as she grew older the pressure for utterance grew in Emily the stronger. Fortunate for us, otherwise we might have been deprived of such as this: (which Mrs. Bingham lists as "Incomplete or Unfinished". WHY?)

"He strained my faith—did he find it supple?
Shook my strong trust—did it then yield?
Hurled my belief—but did he shatter it?
Racked with suspense, not a nerve failed!

Wrung me with anguish—must be I deserved it,
Though for what wrong he did never say,
Stabbed—while I sued his sweet forgiveness.
Jesus, it's your little 'John'! Why slay me? "

(But then we do not know how much work Mrs. Bingham might have had to put on it.) Another example:

Lethe in my flower
Of which they who drink
In the fadeless orchards
Hear the Bobolink.

Merely flake or petal
As the eye beholds.

Jupiter! My father!
I perceive the rose!

This is one that apparently the editor lists as "merely obscure." For whom? Well there can be nothing "obscure" about this:

"I've none to tell me to but thee,
So when thou failest, nobody.
It was a little tie,
It just held two, nor those it held,
Since somewhere thy sweet face has spilled
Beyond my boundary.

If things were opposite, and me,
And me it were that ebbed from thee
On some unanswering shore,
Wouldst thou seek so? Just say!
That I the answer may pursue
Unto the lips it eddied through,
So—overtaking thee."

No doubt it is salutatory of Mrs. Bingham to lay the Bianchi legend of Emily's love affair. But for the life of me poems like this fix the lineaments of a real lover:

"To be forgot by thee
Surpasses memory
Of other minds;
The heart cannot forget
Unless it contemplate
What it declines.

I was considered, then,
Raised from oblivion
A single time
To be remembered! What?
Worthy to be forgot
Is my renown!"

We are told that Emily was, except for the power of expression, no different from other New England spinsters who lived alone and liked it. Might be. Might be too she meant it when she wrote those moving lines beginning "One year ago jots what?" or rose to veritably apocalyptic heights in,

"We learned the whole of love,
The alphabet, the words,
A chapter, then the mighty book—
Then revelation closed.

But in each other's eyes
An ignorance beheld
Diviner than the childhood's
And each to each a child.

Attempted to expound
What neither understood.
Alas, that wisdom is so large
And truth so manifold!"

Emily wrote, evidently fairly early in her career:

"The earth has many keys.
—Where melody is not
Is the unknown peninsula.
Beauty is nature's fact."

How many of her contemporaries knew it, or, knowing, acted upon the faith? We have seen the extent of that peninsula much diminished in our day and may live to witness, as Emily Dickinson did in her interior vision, the vindication of her prophecy.

SHORT STORIES AND ESSAYS

To Appear In Forthcoming
Numbers of

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REVIEW

The Springtime of My Father by Carlos Bulosan
The Rain by Olive Ghiselin
Home For An Indian by Jack Tanner
Journey South by Harry Sylvester
The Harnessery by H. B. Altuler
O Pioneers by Albert Clements

EXAMINATION OF MODERN AUTHORS:
3: Jules Romains by Harold H. Watts
4: Ernest Hemingway by D. S. Savage
5: D. H. Lawrence by Brewster Ghiselin

THE WAR POETS

by Brewster Ghiselin

OSCAR Williams' "Anthology of the War Poetry of the 20th Century" the War Poets (The John Day Company) is a valuable record of the responses of poets, civilians and fighters, to the two great wars of our time. It is not to be judged merely as a gathering of the best poetry of the Wars. Some of the best is left out, notably John Peale Bishop's poetry of the first World War. And not all of it is good, some is not even competent. But reading it all, one can see what the Wars have meant to a diversity of poets, representative men and women with ability to communicate their experience.

Moreover, because some of the writers represented have had to a high degree the power and integrity of artists, one can find in the book an insight into the meaning of these wars.

The poets of the first World War, for the most part refusing to connive in acceptance, set about exposing the pity and terror of war and the stupidity and guilt of those who tolerate or promote it. Few today would, like Hardy in his sonnet of 1915, "The Pity of It," which heads Part I of this volume, blame only some scapegoat for men's enmity, "bold bad" men: "Whosoever they be / At root and bottom of this . . . " As understanding grew, such poets of the first War as Owen and Cummings laid the blame more widely, approached the position of Geoffrey Grigson, who wrote in 1941:

Who must you blame? The young head
And the vile aimer's hand
And the whole heart of man.

Much of the poetry of the second World War is written from the assumption that war is evidence of fundamental evil or unhealth in our whole civilization. The deep disease was recognized long before the second war. Auden and a chorus of followers proclaimed its existence and examined its manifestations. Prokosch and others reported its advances.

Now after years of war, our sufferings, realizations, and rededications have not much changed things. .The world is the same one:

The rich still sliding in their limousines,
Churchill returning with his oranges . . .

Auden's image of the world between the Wars, corrupt, confused, and prevaring horror, as in "Spain" and "September 1, 1939," or as in his early "Ode: to My Pupils," not in this collection, is a true image of our world today, a world of triggered disaster still, though the war is over.

The poets of our time, like those of the first War, have written much about these aspects of war, the mere awareness of which ought to prevent its recurrence if man were a creature of reason and free will. But a disease cannot be cured by discoursing on the symptoms, however they may fascinate the patient. And in an agony, it is the causes and cure that should interest the sufferer most. Various cures are proposed by the War poets, among them Robinson Jeffers' old one, a turning outward (from our "obsession in humanity," and the one so prominent in the decade before World War II, the radical's dream of social justice. Love is highly recommended by more than one:

the word is love.
Surely one fearless kiss would cure
The million fevers . . .

But there is little unanimity. And there seems to be no program for remedial action that many men together would be likely to accept and use. Yet unless one is found, we shall go on living in the old ways, and death — it is obvious — will come in again by the same doors.

Perhaps it is enough praise to say that in this book a great deal of the fate and predicament of modern man is revealed— some of the truth about us, not winnowed and arranged, but accessible, a revelation which makes the real importance of the anthology. Its value does not come primarily from the esthetic value of the best work in it, but from the use which the whole serves, a use to which, however, the best poems in the book contribute most because the insight they embody is most nearly complete.

When a poet tries to define the whole of his insight, much of his meaning must subsist in the poem as form — as the complicated system of gestures he makes because words fail him. Meanings so embodied are not easy to discuss. For they are not experienced as discourse, but as modifications of our sensibility.

Such "meaning" is very close to "being." The poems in which it is fully developed involve as nearly as may be "the whole heart of man," that plexus of meaning and being which shapes and sustains the human world as we know it. If the world is to be reshaped, poetry will work at the heart of its change. Reading a poet whose insight is fresh and full, all may participate in the ordering and reordering of the very structure of humanity's life as it exists and is modified in the richest poetic experience.

But the poetry must be read. It is dangerous to read poetry, for in reading we are enlarged and freed, we tend to become "the whole heart of man," to accept our guilt and our responsibilities, including the responsibility for the creation of a future. It is easier and for the moment pleasanter not to understand and to be, to go on blaming someone else and hoping for the best. But it is still more dangerous not to read poetry, and, in the long run, far more unpleasant.

POEMS OF HOELDERLIN

by Francis C. Golffing

HOELDERLIN'S poetry, which is poetry of the very highest order, has found in Frederic Prokosch (**Some Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin,** Translated by Frederic Prokosch, New Directions) an able translator. The difficulties confronting any translator of German verse are well-known: they reside mainly in the rhythmical inequality of the two languages, and in our inability to create equivalents for the German polysyllabics. This general crux becomes more pointed in the case of this particular poet, for Hölderlin achieves many of his greatest stylistic effects by employing compound adjectives which are usually followed by terse abstract nouns after the model of the Greeks.

Hölderlin's mature style is exemplified in a series of long free-verse poems inspired by Pindar. These pieces are magnificent in their visionary sweep, their

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mastery of cadence and the intensity of their emotion. Perhaps the most famous of these is the hymn entitled **Patmos,** in which the Greek and the German spirits are curiously merged. In his rendering of this piece Mr. Prokosch gives the most compelling proof of his ability.

He is perhaps less happy in his attempts at imitating Hölderlin's Greek meters such as Alcaics and Asclepiadeans. The German poet handled these regular odic meters strictly and yet with supreme ease. In English they sound invariably factitious or wooden, due no doubt to the monosyllabic character of the language.

There are few actual mis-translations (which are remarkable in view of the fact that Hölderlin is by no means a lucid poet), yet several awkward substitutions, such as "tender floor" for **weichem Boden,** or the pseudo-poetic "arise" for the simple German **stehn** (in **The Half of Life**). Still, these minor blemishes cannot detract from the value of Prokosch's translation, which is a very remarkable achievement indeed.

NO VOICE IS WHOLLY LOST

by Elizabeth Thayler

THE title, **No Voice is Wholly Lost** (by Harry Slochower, Creative Age Press, 1945), carries its thesis. More than a critical compendium of writers and thinkers in war and peace, this book reveals its philosophic stature by combining a study of the diverse elements in our war culture with an example of the critic's own social function. Rather than expose the stages of intellectual decline and fruition (which would have been merely another scholarly report) Mr. Slochower is seeking unity and clarity in a period of chaotic and adulterous attachments, thus revealing his own attitude of intellectual responsibility.

Thus the critic has paralleled the artist's search for unity by "re-discovering" him (even such violent negativists as Celine and Kafka) in a new and integrative light. By relaxing their superficially "fixed" positions in the cultural frame, and penetrating the veil of dogmatic labels, he finds the "waverings within doctrines which had long prided themselves on being firm systems." In exploring the catacombs of their reasoning, he exposes the **trompe-l'oeil** behind which many of our modern minds are concealed.

For the ambition of the thesis and the ingenuity of approach, Prof. Slochower establishes a new, exciting level in criti-

cism. The reader is carried through the tempestuous drama of modern expression. He is drawn from the painful recourses of Bohemian literature (Huxley, Hemingway, Schnitzler) into the camp of the traditionalists, with their yearning for a status of the past (Undset, Santayana, Proust, Eliot). The theme of individualism is heralded by Nietzsche. "Absolute doubt" is seen in Gide and Dos Passos, while primitive identification is the refuge for Gauguin, D. H. Lawrence, Hamsun. Fascism is "The Systematization of Confusion." With its curtained appeals, it is revealed as the sham agglomerate of existing ideologies, perverted by the fascists and shaped to serve their immediate needs. Spengler, "too clearly a fascist," is rejected by them, while Nietzsche is canonized for his very ambivalence.

Similarly, the intellectual renegades, considering themselves victims of civilization, science and reason, embraced and distorted Freud's "unconscious" and Marx's "revolution" as the theoretical justification for social irresponsibility. But they had only "grasped at the superficial aspects of Freudianism—and missed the freedom of the Marxian dialectic." A universal culture is to be found in the synthesis of Marxian and Freudian analyses: 'a human order which would heighten, not submerge the individual value." (Malraux, Mann, Marx, Freud.)

Slochower's technique is itself creative. A dynamics in literary interpretation and consumption has been set up: a kind of literary maieutics where critic abstracts from writer, and reader draws actively from critic. One of its most striking features is the organic inter-relation between the author's critical procedure and his thesis. His methodology is itself exemplary of the book's proposal. Its own technical "counterpoint" spirals around the counterpoint of the disparate Voices. Unity is the keynote throughout. The critical method thus unites with its focus of material, the whole work illustrating a dynamic concatenate of the two.

There is, at times, the effect of a foliage of allusion, a preponderance of citations which seem to dislocate the reader's attention. This seems unavoidable when we consider the incredible scope of his material. We are carried from one provocative statement to another with little enough of the intellectual pause, and at

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the close, we are left somewhat breathless by an exciting range of suggestion. In spite of academic weight, the book retains a strongly sensitive, almost lyric prose-style.

Prof. Slochower's conclusion is healthy; his method controversial. But for imaginative inquiry, and the startling fertility of its subject alone, **No Voice is Wholly Lost** deserves serious attention as an important reflection of our intellectual life. Slochawer has shown, too, that an expansive temperament leads the critic to dwell in the larger relationship: that of fullest recognition of the social and cultural interplay, and finally, one of conscious union with the harmonic forces of a potentially broad and resilient "dialectic humanism."

Since the first paragraph of "comment" on page 66 was written the single remaining complete file of RMR has been sold and $50 credited to the contributors fund. Other early issues are still available, however.

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